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ABSTRACT

Every community has areas--public parks, schoolyards, sidewalks--that are neglected, vandalized, or just plain run down. Young people can help clean up those places by getting involved in a community cleanup project. As explained in this bulletin, a community cleanup is a project in which volunteers of all ages work together to spruce up a chosen site. The bulletin addresses the following topics: "What Is a Community Cleanup?"; "What Does a Community Cleanup Do To Prevent Crime?"; "What Does It Take To Start a Community Cleanup?"; "What Does It Take To Keep a Community Cleanup Going?"; "What Are Some of the Challenges of a Community Cleanup?"; "What Are Some of the Rewards of a Community Cleanup?"; and "How Can the Cleanup Be Evaluated?" The bulletin lists several organizations that can provide further information. (BT)

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Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
(Dept. Of Justice), Washington, D. C.

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60

NATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK

Youth in action

July 1999 NUMBER 09

OJJDP

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

BULLETIN

Community Cleanup

What Is a Community Cleanup?

A community cleanup brings volunteers together to clean, repair, and improve public spaces or other areas (such as vacant lots or abandoned properties) that have been neglected, vandalized, or misused. Cleanup projects can involve all kinds of public spaces—parks, riverbanks, schoolyards, sidewalks, playing fields, and even parking lots, to name just a few.

A group of students in Brooklyn, NY, restored a children's garden that had become overgrown and filled with trash and drug paraphernalia. Working with older students, the city parks department, and the Cooperative Extension Service, the group members created a garden and became involved in the cycle of planting and harvesting. The garden is flourishing again because of their dedication.

What Does a Community Cleanup Do To Prevent Crime?

Cleanups show that people who use an area care about its appearance. Crime is less likely to occur when a neighborhood is clean, well lighted, and used frequently by residents and their friends. By reclaiming an abandoned park or playground, eliminating tall weeds and debris from a vacant lot, or sprucing up sidewalks and public spaces along the street, you'll be making the territory less attractive to criminals and more attractive to the community, which makes the community safer.

What Does It Take To Start a Community Cleanup?

A good first step is to look around at areas that need attention. Is a community park littered? Is an empty lot filled with tires, construction materials, and overgrown bushes? Is a nearby

from the administrator

Every community has areas—public parks, schoolyards, sidewalks—that are neglected, vandalized, or just plain run down. You can help clean up those places by getting involved in a community cleanup project. As explained in this Bulletin, a community cleanup is a project in which volunteers of all ages work together—mowing grass, picking up trash, hauling away equipment, etc.—to spruce up a chosen site. By playing your part in cleaning up your community, you will help make it more attractive to residents—and less attractive to criminals!

stream an eyesore that discourages people from enjoying it?

Look at the people in your group. What skills do they have? Picking up trash and mowing grass require one level of skills; hauling huge hunks of concrete or using chainsaws to cut up lumber calls for another. Helping hands are the most important ingredient for a successful outcome; many of the materials and services needed can be donated by local businesses and governments, even for a major community spruce-up.

Create partnerships. Joining up with another neighborhood or community group can build your group's credibility and provide more help to get the work done. Environmental groups, civic associations, the local recreation and parks department, business associations, service clubs, and religious and social groups may be able to help or suggest other groups.

If the proposed cleanup site is privately owned, you will need to get written permission from the owner. You may have to check local land records to identify the owner. For a public site, contact local government agencies, such as the permits and licenses office or the police department, to find out what permits may be needed, what guidelines exist, and what kind of help is available. Special trash pickup, trash bags, and work gloves may be yours for the asking.

Whatever the site, establish goals for the cleanup. Will all the trash be picked up? Will new trash cans be installed? Will fresh paint liven up the playground equipment? Do you need to paint over graffiti? What about cutting underbrush, pruning bushes and trees, or planting flowers?

When you've thought through what you want to do, make two lists: one itemizing the supplies you need for each task and the other showing the order in which the tasks need to be completed. For instance, mowing grass next to a freshly painted fence could blow grass onto the wet paint, so plan to mow before painting. Trimming bushes or trees may call for special equipment and the advice of an experienced person.

Think about who can donate their know-how, lend equipment, or provide supplies at no cost. Set up a subcommittee that will approach these people to get them interested in your project; help them see how they'll help the community by working with you. Don't forget to check with local civic associations and government agencies (such as the parks and sanitation departments).

Check the site in advance for any hazards—drug paraphernalia, poison ivy, thorny bushes, or glass and metal that could cut and harm volunteers. Make sure your group has the proper equipment and knowledge to deal with these problems.

Need to recruit volunteers beyond your core group? Get the word out to other youth and adults. Use posters, fliers, and handouts. Ask local radio stations to publicize your event at

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. *This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:*

- *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- *Planning a Successful Project.*
- *Lining Up Resources.*
- *Acting on Your Plans.*
- *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section. Good luck!

no charge; maybe a station will even send its community service staff or a deejay on the day of the cleanup. Be sure to tell people when their help will be needed and for how long.

Get refreshments and make sure you have arranged for cleanup and trash disposal. Often, if you work with the sanitation department, arrangements can be made for special pickups throughout the day or for help with removing hazardous waste.

What Does It Take To Keep a Community Cleanup Going?

A cleanup can be a one-time event. The activity can also continue by moving the cleanup from one location to another—for example, from the school playing field to a neighborhood park. Or, a specific site can be "adopted" and kept clean.

Sharing the work—letting people do different jobs that appeal to them—makes each new cleanup a fresh opportunity for volunteers. Special themes or "bring-a-friend" days can help liven up the work.

Make sure your community cleanup goals are realistic. It's a good idea to start with a project that can be accomplished in one afternoon and work up to larger projects. By cleaning up a park in a day, you will generate positive momentum for the next project.

Whether your cleanup project is a one-time event or a year-long commitment, don't forget to celebrate the results. Before-and-after photos and videotapes, coverage by local news media, and thank-you letters from area residents can help. Refreshments throughout the cleanup and a meal (sandwiches, a pizza party, or a cookout) at the end can make volunteers look forward to working together again. T-shirts or hats that identify your group can help build a sense of teamwork.

What Are Some of the Challenges of a Community Cleanup?

You'll need help from other youth and a few adults. Recruiting a core group to support the effort can be a challenge because many people are busy with other things. Point out the benefits to the neighborhood and the whole community of cleaning up the site and encourage the idea of partnerships and friends working together.

Tackling a large project could require a whole weekend or even 4 to 5 days. Keeping volunteers energized, ensuring that all the materials are on hand, providing appropriate refreshments and sanitary facilities, and varying work assignments are all challenges. However, working in small teams, having group lunches or snacks as a break (with portable music, if appropriate), and taking pictures can all spur activity.

What Are Some of the Rewards of a Community Cleanup?

A community cleanup provides some of the most tangible rewards of any anticrime program. The results are immediately visible. People might even stop to thank you while you're still working. Children may come out of their houses and wait eagerly to use the repaired playground equipment. And as your volunteers walk, skate, or drive by the site, each one will take pride in knowing that he or she helped regain an attractive, usable space for the neighborhood.

How Can the Cleanup Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and

how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting any evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."[1] You will want to be able to show that your community cleanup does one or all of the following:

- ◇ Improves the appearance of an area that was previously neglected, abandoned, vandalized, or misused.
- ◇ Allows community members to use and enjoy the improved area more than they did before the cleanup.
- ◇ Strengthens the community ties of those involved in the cleanup.

The best way to start evaluating your project is to reflect on your original goals. First, look at the immediate results. Are all the trees trimmed? Is all the trash removed? Is all the playground equipment in good condition? Second, see whether the space is now being used. Do parents bring their small children out to play on the cleaned-up sidewalks? Do kids now play ball on the field? Third, see whether the results stand the test of time. Periodically check the site in the months after your cleanup. Is it still clean? Has any vandalism occurred? Do the police notice a difference in crime reports from this site? Have drug dealers stopped taking over the park benches?

You should also ask whether the message of your project reached other youth. Did they learn what you were trying to teach them? Be sure to include an evaluation step in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

In evaluating your community cleanup, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◇ Reduces crime or fear of crime in your community.
- ◇ Educates and informs a target audience.
- ◇ Is cost effective.
- ◇ Has a lasting impact.
- ◇ Attracts support and resources.
- ◇ Makes people feel safer and better about being members of their community.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Go for it!

[1] National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Environmental Protection Agency Office of Sustainable Ecosystems and Communities

401 M Street SW.
Washington, DC 20460
202–260–4002
202–401–2213 (Fax)
Internet: www.epa.gov/ecocommunity

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC)

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736
301–519–5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Keep America Beautiful, Inc.

1010 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06901
203–323–8987
203–325–9199 (Fax)
Internet: www.kab.org

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
202–296–1356 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncpc.org

National Pollution Prevention Center for Higher Education

Dana Building, University of Michigan
430 East University Boulevard
Ann Arbor, MI 48109–1115
313–764–1412
734–647–5814 (Fax)
Internet: www.snre.umich.edu/nppc

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Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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